NEA Resources

www.APIresources.org is a Web site clearinghouse that provides educational resources and information about the Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) community for students, parents, and educators. The educational resources include APIA booklists and film titles, links to many educational associations, and different studies conducted about the APIA community. Created by the Organization of Chinese Americans in conjunction with the National Education Association.

Additional Resources

Cites to these Web sites are provided for informational purposes only, and their listing here does not constitute NEA endorsement of the resources offered, activities promoted, or other content included on these Web sites.

Educational Organizations and Conferences

- Asian and Pacific Islander Caucus of the NEA Annual conference in April 2005. www.geocities.com/apic03/index.html
- Association for Asian American Studies, Annual conference in April 2005, www.aaastudies.org
- National Association for Asian and Pacific American Education, Annual conference in May 2005, www.naapae.net
- National Association for the Education and Advancement of Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans, Annual conference in April 2005, http://equity4.clmer.csulb.edu/netshare/kclam/apa/nafea.htm
- National Pacific Islander Educator Network, Annual conference in November 2004, www.geocities.com/npienwebsite
- Native Hawaiian Education Council, www.nhec.org

Sample Curriculum on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders

- "A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the U.S. Constitution." This interactive online exhibit uses images, music, text, and first-person accounts to examine the detention of Japanese Americans during WWII. http://americanhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/experience/index.html
- "American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawaii." Lesson plans based on PBS's "American Aloha" reveals how, after years of being shadowed by stereotypes, the hula is experiencing a rebirth that celebrates Hawaiian culture. www.pbs.org/pov/pov2003/americanaloha
- "Asian Pacific American Heritage." Scholastic's teacher's guide offers several elementary and middle school lesson plans that draw on various subject areas to teach about APIs. http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/asian-american/tguide.htm
- "The Chinese Boycott Case." Using primary documents from the National Archives, this lesson plan examines prejudice against Chinese immigrants in the United States in the late 1800s, as well as relevant court cases. www.archives.gov/digital_classroom/lessons/chinese_boycott_case/chinese_boycott_case.html
- "Pinoy Teach." Pinoy Teach is a curriculum that integrates Philippine and Filipino American history and culture, and consists of a textbook, teacher manual, professional development program, school-based partnership program, and products. www.pinoyteach.com
- "Turbans." Distributed by the National Asian American Telecommunications Association, "Turbans" is a documentary about the inner struggles of an Asian Indian immigrant family torn between its cultural traditions and the desire for social acceptance in America. www.kqed.org/w/mosaic/asianamerican2
- "Vietnamese Americans." Developed by Teaching Tolerance this curriculum guide sheds light on the complexities of this unique identity group—and encourages users to bridge cultural gaps through awareness of shared experiences. www.tolerance.org/teach/expand/vietnamese

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2004 – 2005

Focus On Asian/Pacific Islanders

We must do more to close the achievement gap. We must ensure that every child is learning and succeeding in school, regardless of race, gender, and sexual orientation.—Reg Weaver, President, National Education Association

The National Education Association's commitment to creating great public schools for every child requires working to ensure that all students are learning and succeeding in schools. This task is challenging. From its beginnings, our nation's school system has treated students differently, depending on their race, social class, and gender, and even today, a significant gap in academic achievement persists among groups.

The 2004 - 2005 Focus On *series examines and enriches our understanding of this achievement gap for six groups: American Indian and Alaska Native students; Asian and Pacific Islander students; Black students; Hispanic students; women and girls; and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered students. Each publication highlights some of the barriers to learning and success faced by one of these groups of students, concrete strategies to address these barriers, and additional resources for school personnel.*

All too often, students of Asian and Pacific Islander (API) heritage get lost in discussions of educational inequity. They are sometimes stereotyped as the "model minority," the racial minority group that, through hard work, has "made it" and achieved The American Dream. Educational and economic data seem to confirm this stereotype. In 2003, among fourth and eighth graders across the United States, API students achieved scores comparable to White students and significantly higher than other students of color on reading and mathematics standardized tests.[1] Asian adults 25 years old and over had graduated from college at a rate almost twice the national average.[2] In 2001, APIs had a higher median household income than all other groups, including Whites.

But as with other groups, the case of API students is more complex and troubling than these numbers suggest. The API population is very diverse, with nearly 50 ethnic groups, over 100 language groups, and various religions and histories. Some students descended from immigrants, some are recently arrived refugees from war-torn countries, some are native to Hawaiian lands, and more and more are growing up in mixed-race families. These differences help to explain why certain ethnic groups, particularly Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders, have educational and economic attainment much lower than the national average.[3] For example, in 2000, only 14 percent of Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander adults and 8 percent of Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian adults had graduated from college, which is a rate significantly less than even for Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native adults. Poverty rates were similarly worse: The percentage of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders living in poverty were at almost one-and-a-half times the national average, and the percentage of Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian communities at almost two-and-a-half times. In fact, the high median household income cited above is misleading: API families were larger in size than the national average, resulting in a *per capita* income thousands of dollars less than that for Whites.

When applied to API students and their experiences in school, the "model minority" stereotype can mask tremendous diversity and exacerbate problems.[4] We are less likely to recognize when API students are struggling and to create policies and programs that meet their unique needs, and more likely to conclude that high test scores mean all is well and that those who are underachieving are simply not trying hard enough. Closing the achievement gap cannot be done without attending to the systemic barriers to learning and succeeding uniquely experienced by API students. The sections that follow will propose ways to address these barriers through instruction, curriculum, policy, and community partnerships.

INSTRUCTIONAL ISSUES

In 2000, nearly 69 percent of Asians and 20 percent of Pacific Islanders were born outside of the United States (compared to 11 percent of the general population). Over half of all API students were non-native English speakers. Perhaps not surprisingly, language often proves to be a significant barrier to academic achievement. Non-native English speakers face the dual challenge of learning the English language while learning the content of other subject areas, often at pace with their English-proficient peers in classrooms with teachers untrained in bilingual education. Language differences some-

continued

times leads to mislabeling English language learners as learning disabled, which is ironic since, according to the U.S. Department of Education, API students are underrepresented in special education programs, perhaps because of the "model minority" myth.

At a more subtle level, *cultural* differences can also hinder academic achievement. Even students who are proficient in English may experience clashes between the cultures in their homes and the cultures in schools. Assumptions about how to be accepted (or to avoid being teased) by peers, how to behave like a "good student" or turn in "good work," how to balance the demands of home with those of school, and so forth often differ from one person or context to another. Different assumptions can lead to miscommunication and other problems. For example a student who is used to conversing very freely might be disciplined for being "rude" when entering a discussion in which students are expected to take turns. The problem snowballs as the student feels silenced or restricted, as the class loses the potential contribution of this student, and as the teacher labels the student a disruption, or an unmotivated student, and treats the student accordingly.

Ensuring that all students learn and succeed in school requires developing the cultural competency of both the educator and the student. Educators need to learn about the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the students in the classroom, including the assumptions, norms, and values that can affect when and how they participate.[5] With this knowledge, educators will be better equipped to communicate with and engage their students. This does not mean that educators will be able to fully know the students' cultures and be able to communicate seamlessly. Students come from many different cultures, each with its own richness and history, making it nearly impossible for educators to ever fully know every culture represented in the classroom. It is important not to simply replace one stereotype or generalization of API students with another. Educators need to be mindful of the ways that their own cultures and assumptions, and perspectives of who their students are, will always be partial.

Similarly, students need to learn about the culture of the classroom and the school, especially the unspoken assumptions, norms, and values that dictate what it means to learn and succeed. These range from the delineated learning "standards" to the unspoken expectations of what behaviors, contributions, dispositions, for example, make for a "good student." This is not to dismiss the culture of the students' heritage. Rather it acknowledges that, in schools and society in general, there are certain things that students need to know and be able to do in order to achieve or succeed—in exams, in competitions, in job interviews, and so forth—and that this information needs to be made explicit and accessible.

CURRICULUM STRATEGIES

Raising awareness of and respect for cultural differences are things that need to happen with all students. On the one hand, this means making the curriculum more inclusive. From the natural sciences to the social sciences and humanities, lessons can make links to APIs across the United States, including their struggles with racism and other "isms," as well as to APIs in the local community. Such inclusion not only can help students see relevance in what they are learning, but also can challenge the silencing and stereotyping of APIs that happen all too often in school curriculum. Fortunately, there is no need to reinvent the wheel: a growing body of curriculum materials is available to educators (see *Resources*, p. 4).

Of course, even inclusive curriculum have both strengths and weaknesses. They cannot help but to include some information, tell some perspectives, and challenge some stereotypes, but not others. For example, lessons about APIs that focus solely on foods and festivals, or the positive things they bring to the United States, often fail to raise awareness of the discrimination and inequity experienced by APIs.

In addition to making the curriculum more inclusive, educators also need to teach students to examine the gaps and perspectives in whatever they are learning.[6] This applies to lessons about APIs, as well as to any lesson or any topic, including those mandated by the standards and standardized tests that currently drive educational policy. Any curriculum has hidden messages, from the curriculum that excludes APIs and teaches that they do not matter in society, to the curriculum that includes APIs in simplistic ways, thereby reinforcing certain stereotypes. Although not always able to voice their intuitions, students can be acutely aware of social injustices, and as many educators have observed, they often do not need much encouragement before engaging heartily in lessons that make links to these realities. When students are able to analyze the partial nature of whatever they are learning, they will be empowered to think for themselves.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The federal No Child Left Behind Act is leaving many API students behind. For example, it requires that students be taught in English after three consecutive years of being in school, despite research showing that students need more time to develop enough proficiency to function at grade level.[7] Federal funding has failed to increase even while the number of English language learners continues to increase. The large percentage of API students with native languages other than English requires that schools have bilingual education programs and teachers who have been prepared to work successfully with linguistically diverse students.

Another set of policies that are having a negative impact on API students involves learning "standards" and high-stakes tests. At the national, state, and local levels, the lists of what all students "should" know or be able to do are growing in scope and number, as are requirements that teachers follow scripts of what and how to teach. What results are "standards" and curriculums that include little on APIs, as well as instructional and assessment practices that fail to account for different learning styles and for language and cultural barriers to learning and to demonstrating what was learned. Such reforms are not benefiting the students most in need. States are predicting that large percentages of their students will fail the tests needed for promotion and graduation, and that the majority of their schools will fail to meet "adequate yearly progress."

School personnel need to take a more active role in affecting policy at the local, state, and federal levels, especially through lobbying, community education, and voter mobilization.[8] We must take responsibility for electing and educating public officials and decisionmakers about the harmful effects of current legislation and policy on API students and the existence of alternatives.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

While some API parents choose not to get involved in their children's schools, others might want to get involved but confront barriers. As with students struggling with language differences and cultural uncertainties, parents likewise may struggle with communicating in a new language and a new cultural environment. They face navigating a maze of unspoken expectations about where to go, whom to ask, how to interact, what to protest, when to offer services, and even why to resist in particular situations.[9] Parental involvement programs need to be assessed for the ways that they are and are not linguistically accessible and culturally competent. They need to offer parents support in learning the system and feeling welcomed into the school community. Helpful resources often lie in the communities themselves, and therefore, APIs *need to be included on committees and advisory boards to help determine the policies, programs, and practices that are most likely to benefit their children*.

Indeed, APIs need to become more integrated in all aspects of schools, including in the school personnel. The school population across the United States will be "majority minority" in two decades, yet, only 1 percent of teachers are API and 42 percent of schools have no teachers of color. More resources are needed for the recruitment and retention of APIs in the education professions and teacher-preparation programs.

Forthcoming Resource

Over the next few years, NEA Human and Civil Rights will release a series of reports on the *Status of Education on Underserved Groups*. As part of the series, a report on Asian and Pacific Islander (API) students, due out in May 2005, will include information on diversity among API students, policy analyses, implications for classroom practice, and additional resources. To assist in producing the content for this report, NEA will partner with the Asian Pacific American Institute for Congressional Studies to hold a national summit in January 2005 that brings together researchers, national leaders, and NEA members and staff to offer their perspectives on problems and promising strategies for addressing API issues in education.

Notes

1. National Center for Education Statistics, *National Assessment of Educational Progress*, 2003. *Mathematics and Reading Scale Scores*, www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard

2. U.S. Census Bureau, *The Asian Population*: 2000, *The Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Population*: 2000, and *Educational Attainment in the United States*: 2003, www.census.gov

3. Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, "A Dream Denied: Educational Experiences of Southeast Asian American Youth," www.searac.org/pryd3_1_03.html

4. Stacey Lee, *Unraveling the "Model Minority" Stereotype: Listening to Asian American Youth* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996).

5. Eric Yo Ping Lai, ed., *The New Face of Asian Pacific America: Numbers, Diversity, and Change in the 21st Century* (San Francisco: AsianWeek Books, 2003), www.asianweek.com; John Tsuchida and Juanita Lott, *Cultural Backgrounds and Educational Issues: A Guide on Asian and Pacific Islander American Students, 2nd edition* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1999).

6. Kevin Kumashiro, *Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning Toward Social Justice* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004).

7. National Asian Pacific American Legal Consortium, "*Lau v. Nichols* (1974) and Asian Americans" (Washington, D.C.: NAPALC, 2004).

8. National Council of Asian Pacific Americans, *Call to Action: Platform for Asian Pacific Americans National Policy Priorities* 2004, www.ncapaonline.org

9. National Coalition of Advocates for Students, *Unfamiliar Partners: Asian Parents and U.S. Public Schools*, 1997, www.ncasboston.org

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